

Making a Difference

WINTER 2007



Institute Grows Grassroots Advocates

Welcome Home
GCDD's Legislative Priorities

www.gcdd.org



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A quarterly magazine of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities collaborates with Georgia's citizens, public and private advocacy organizations and policymakers to positively influence public policies that enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

GCDD provides this through education and advocacy activities, program implementation, funding and public policy analysis and research.

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To Georgia's Disability Community,

Over the last four years, you have seen many positive changes in how the State can support individuals with disabilities and their families. Your proactive advocacy for yourselves, your loved ones and your family and friends provided your elected officials the impetus to find new ways of doing business through the new Developmental Disability Waiver Programs. This resulted in increasing financial support for a multi-year funding plan and reducing the state's waiting lists.

After 1,600 Georgians representing the disability community rallied on the steps of the State Capitol, the State of Georgia took major steps towards meeting the needs of Georgians with disabilities by:

- Awarding 1,500 Medicaid waivers substantially increasing supports for individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Providing more choice to individuals in selecting the type of community-based services they receive and who provides those services.
- Meeting the exact home and community-based services needed by individuals based on an in-depth understanding of their individual lives and interests.

With each passing year, Georgia continues to improve the quality of life for our citizens with disabilities with a fair, equitable and transparent funding system that focuses on meeting each person's exact needs. Over the next four years, we will continue to make progress in creating a quality service system that enables active participation of people with disabilities and their families in making decisions.

We will continue supporting a person-centered approach that recognizes the role of natural supports and enabling individuals and families to have more control over the resources that support them. Most importantly, we will continue addressing the waiting list for home and community-based services and moving individuals from institutions and nursing home into their community.

I will need your help and support to make this a reality. While Georgia is moving toward this vision, it has been particularly gratifying for me to come to know and work with the advocates and self-advocates for people with disabilities. You work tirelessly for more choice in employment, housing, services and a better quality of life for all Georgians with disabilities.

By working together, we have truly made a great deal of progress and can better serve the disability community in the future as we build a better Georgia.



Sonny Perdue
Sonny Perdue
Governor



Community Advocacy Continues to Evolve

For 15 years, the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities has supported advocacy and leadership training focused on teaching people how to advocate for themselves or a loved one. Campaigns such as Unlock the Waiting Lists!, Family Support, Children’s Freedom Initiative and Fives Too Late have relied on the leadership of graduates from Partners in Policymaking and Georgia Voices that Count. These graduates have assumed many leadership roles in the disability community.



In strategy sessions around legislative advocacy efforts, it is not uncommon to ask which Partners in Policymaking or Georgia Voices that Count graduate lives in a legislative district or who can come to the Capitol to speak about an issue.

We have just begun a new legislative session, and we hope to be as successful as we have been in the past in addressing the many issues that face people with developmental disabilities and their families. However, we must recognize that working alone, we will not be able to sustain the level of support we have experienced in the past. Eventually it will be other groups’ turn to get

the few discretionary dollars available through the legislative process. That is unless we look to our neighbors and communities to become part of this movement.

In this edition of *Making a Difference*, we will introduce you to a new program supported by GCDD – the Organizing Institute. The question that GCDD is asking is “what is next?” What is the next evolution in the advocacy movement – how do we make our advocacy efforts even stronger than they have been in the past? We hope to learn from current and previous social justice efforts. Eight individuals with the assistance of Project South are participating in the first class of the Organizing Institute.

Participants will have the knowledge and support to organize local communities to affect and change public policies, and challenge and hold systems accountable. Our goal is to help people organize on a local level and bring friends, neighbors, congregants and colleagues together to have discussions about important social issues such as disability. Meg Wheatley, a social anthropologist, wrote, “Who we become together will always be different than who we are alone. Our range of creative expression increases as we join with others. Relationships create new capacity.” Each of us must engage the many relationships we have so that everyone is a part of creating solutions.

“Our range of creative expression increases as we join with others.”

We want to create dialogues throughout Georgia where neighbor asks neighbors about what is important in our communities. This should bring about an understanding that people with disabilities are part of our community, need to be welcomed into our community, have gifts and talents to offer to our community, and may need supports to remain in our community. With your help we can create social justice through grassroots change, and as the Reverend Jim Lawson wrote about the “beloved community,” we can create a “place where the barriers between people gradually come down and where citizens make a constant effort to address even the most difficult problems of ordinary people.”

Finally, please join our community on February 22, 2007 for the annual Disability Day at the Capitol. This year’s event promises to be our biggest and best yet.

We want to hear from you. You can reach me at (888) 275-4233 or you can e-mail me at eejacobson@dhr.state.ga.us.

Eric E. Jacobson
Executive Director, GCDD

**If you give me a fish, you have fed me for one day
If you teach me to fish, you have fed me . . .
until the river is contaminated or the shoreline seized for development.
But if you teach me to organize, then whatever the challenge, I can join together
with my peers. And we will fashion our own solution. – ANONYMOUS**



Letters to the Editor

Letters should include the writer's full name, address, phone number, and may be edited for purpose of clarity and space.

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GOVERNOR'S
 COUNCIL ON
 DEVELOPMENTAL
 DISABILITIES

Make the Best of Advocacy Opportunities

Regardless of age or political affiliation I believe that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to watch the recent release of the movie *Bobby*, about the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, and not wonder, what might have been?

Sadly many of us in our role as advocates must at some point ask the same question of ourselves if we do not take full advantage of the opportunities that we are afforded not only as individual advocates but while serving on a variety of boards, councils and commissions.

Recently, as I looked back on my tenure as a council member, I reflected on the opportunities that membership has afforded me to advocate not only for my son, Tyler, but for others including myself, as well. Because one thing that I have learned during this period is that we all have the same dreams, desires and aspirations, and sooner or later we will be faced with challenges that require the support of others.

Having realized this I had to ask myself, had I done my best? What opportunities did I squander? How could I have done more to make a difference with this opportunity?

"...we all have the same dreams, desires and aspirations, and sooner or later we will be faced with challenges that require the support of others."

Did I attend all the committee and council meetings that required my presence? While attending did I focus on the tasks at hand and contribute appropriately? Did I advocate within my community when presented with the opportunity? Did I aim for the highest standards, or did I settle for something a little easier? Did I take advantage of opportunities that would have made me a better-prepared and informed advocate? Did I build partnerships and positive relationships, or did I burn bridges and create unnecessary obstacles to progress? What could I have done differently to effect a meaningful change?

As you enter into this New Year, I challenge you to ask yourself the same questions now so that you might be better prepared to meet the challenges that the future holds.

I challenge you to do it now while you have the means and opportunity to make a difference. Not years from now when you can only wonder, what might have been?



Tom Seegmueller
 Chairperson, GCDD



President Signs Respite Bill

President George W. Bush signed The Lifespan Respite Care Act of 2006 (HR 3248) into law December 21.

The new law authorizes \$289 million over five years for state grants to develop Lifespan Respite Programs to help families access quality, affordable respite care. Lifespan respite programs are defined "as coordinated systems of accessible, community-based respite care services for family caregivers of children and adults with special needs." Specifically, the law authorizes funds for:

- Development of state and local lifespan respite programs
- Planned or emergency respite care services
- Training and recruitment of respite care workers and volunteers
- Caregiver training

Family caregivers provide 80% of long-term care in the U.S., a level of care valued at \$306 billion a year, more than what is spent on nursing home and paid home care combined. Respite provides the much needed temporary break from the often exhausting challenges imposed by constant caregiving.

U.N. Adopts Disability Rights Convention

The Plenary of the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities December 13.

The principles of the Convention include:

- Respect for inherent dignity and individual autonomy, including the freedom to make choices and independence
- Non-discrimination
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of diversity

- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality between men and women
- Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities

The Convention also outlines obligations of U.N. members to raise awareness of disability rights and issues; promote independent living and employment; ensure the right to life; improve protection during and after disasters; provide equality before the law; protect people with disabilities from exploitation and abuse; and more.

Visit www.gcdd.org for a full transcript of the convention.

Autism Act Passes

The U.S. House of Representatives passed S. 843, the Combating Autism Act December 6. This critical legislation authorizes nearly \$1 billion through 2011 in federal funding for autism-related research, early detection and intervention.

S. 843 first passed in the Senate August 3 and contains provisions to strengthen autism research and diagnostics, including a renewed investment to track the incidence and prevalence of autism spectrum disorder; increase public awareness of early identification; promote the use of evidence-based interventions for those at risk for autism; and establish state-level clearinghouses for information on autism.

U.S. Money May Become More Accessible

Federal District Court Judge James Robertson issued a declaratory judgment November 28 on a motion by the American Council of the Blind (ACB), finding the U.S. Department of the Treasury in violation of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act for failing to provide accessible print

currency in a format usable by blind and visually impaired Americans.

The judge directed the Treasury Department to enter discussions with ACB to work out a currency design that will enable people with visual impairments to identify bills by touch and other accessible means.

Of the more than 180 nations that issue paper currency, only the U.S. does not make its currency accessible to visually impaired people.

The Treasury Department appealed the decision December 12, saying the ruling would be too expensive to implement and could negatively affect the vending machine industry.

GVTC Accepting Applications

Georgia Voices that Count (GVTC), a disability rights advocacy training and support program, is now accepting applications through January 31 for its next training session. GVTC trains Georgians with an interest and commitment to disability advocacy.

The new GVTC class, funded by the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, is tentatively scheduled to begin in April, with "students" graduating in February 2008. Georgians who have a disability, a strong interest in disability rights advocacy and no previous formal advocacy training may participate.

Participants are required to attend four training sessions, undertake an advocacy project and provide mentorship to other people with disabilities. Contact Linda Pogue with disABILITY LINK at 404-687-8890, extension 114 for info. ●





Jacobson Named One of Georgia's Most Influential

Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities Executive Director Eric Jacobson has been named one of the 100 most influential Georgians of 2007 by Georgia Trend magazine.

"I'm so honored by this distinction, and it gives me hope that Georgians are beginning to understand the important role people with disabilities play in our communities," Jacobson said.

"This is the ninth annual listing of Georgia's most powerful movers and shakers in business, government, politics, education and community organization," explained *Georgia Trend* Senior Editor Jerry Grillo.

The 100 most influential Georgians edition of the magazine hits the newsstands in January.

Childers Retires

Gary Childers, fiscal officer of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, retired November 30.

A 30-year veteran of Georgia state government, Childers spent his last 12 years with GCDD, ensuring the organization was run efficiently and that contracts and expenditures were processed smoothly. He also maintained the GCDD Web site.



"I'm so honored by this distinction, and it gives me hope that Georgians are beginning to understand the important role people with disabilities play in our communities."

"We will miss Gary's faithful service and wish him all the best in his retirement," said GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson.

LEGISLATORS: Meet Georgia's Vibrant Disability Community!

You are invited to join disability advocates from across the state for the "Make it Real" Rally on Disability Day, February 22, at 11 AM at the Capitol.

- Learn more about the issues facing the disability community
- Be recognized as a disability supporter in *Making a Difference* magazine
- Meet constituents from your district
- Speak to hundreds of voters with disabilities

Plus enjoy a meal with your constituents; breakfast will start at 9:30 AM, and lunch is scheduled for 12:30 PM.



Make it Real!

Please check in at the legislative/media table to receive your information packet and to have your photo taken for *Making a Difference* magazine!

For more information, visit www.gcdd.org or call 404.657.2126 or 888.ASK.GCDD



Disability Day at the Capitol February 22, 2007

Join the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
at the Georgia Capitol to:

- Rally on the Capitol steps
- Celebrate community, advocacy and friendship
- Enjoy breakfast or lunch with advocates and legislators from across Georgia
- Show legislators **WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

For more information,
visit www.gcdd.org or call 888-ASK-GCDD.

ATTENDEE RSVP FORM

Disability Day at the Capitol • February 22, 2007

Please register to attend the breakfast OR luncheon.

RSVP: 404-657-2126, Toll Free 888-ASK-GCDD, FAX 404-657-2132,
TTY 404-657-2133, or www.gcdd.org

Name: _____

Organization: _____ Total # attending: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ Zip Code: _____

E-mail: _____ Telephone: _____

I plan to attend (please check one) _____ Breakfast _____ Lunch

Optional \$10.00 donation per person to support breakfast or luncheon is appreciated,
but not required.

Total payment amount: _____ Total amount enclosed: _____

Please make check payable and return to:

Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities • Disability Day Registration
2 Peachtree St. NW, Suite 26-246, Atlanta, GA 30303.

Please note special accommodations we should be aware of: _____



Disability Day SCHEDULE

9:30 AM

Breakfast at the Depot

11:00 AM

**"Make It Real!"
Rally at the Capitol Steps**

12:30 PM

Lunch at the Depot



New Institute **GROWS** Grassroots Advocates

Creating lasting change starts with changing the hearts and minds of neighbors, friends and families.

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities has created the Organizing Institute to support advocates who are already working hard to make those changes in their own communities across Georgia.

Forty-three people with a passion for advocacy applied for the program that includes fellowships in organizations and focuses efforts on the local level. "Narrowing the field to 13 interviews was very difficult and came out of hours of conversation. After interviews, we selected eight," explained Susanna Mitchell, program associate for GCDD.

"We hoped to attract participants with basic advocacy skills and some relationships already established in their communities," she said.

The Organizing Institute hopes to develop and train grassroots organizers and help them successfully complete projects in their communities. The institute also hopes to connect the disability rights community with other social movements.

"We hoped to attract participants with basic advocacy skills and some relationships already established in their communities."

"We know we have to make progress in reaching those who have little or no connection with disability and bring them into this movement, either actively or passively," explained GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson.

The institute is divided into two sections. In the first section, participants come together for training and project planning sessions, and in the second, they implement the projects they planned under the sponsorship of a local organization.

"The Organizing Institute is a kind of graduate course for people who have participated in Voices (Georgia Voices that Count) and Partners (Partners in Policymaking). In Partners and Voices, they learn the basics of disability rights and how to apply that knowledge when dealing with systems change issues. In the institute, we are giving them the tools to take all the knowledge and do systems change in a different way," explained GCDD Advocacy Director Kate Gainer.

"We are asking the participants to organize their communities in such a way that disability will no longer be a foreign language. Take their friends, relatives, grocer, banker, insurance agent, etc. and make disability relevant to their lives. We believe that if those conversations start to happen, systems change will happen. But we believe it won't happen until Joe down the street meets and gets to know a person with a disability and starts to work with them where they are equals. Then Joe will see the value of an inclusive community," Gainer said.

The beauty of the training, facilitated by Project South, is that members learn from each others' rich and varied experiences.

"Project South uses popular education, an interactive method that includes historical and lived experiences and also role play. We develop projects as a group in this collective experience. Each session builds on the last," revealed Stephanie Guilloud, a program director for Project South, an organization that provides movement-building skills to social justice organizations.

The curriculum itself is determined with input from the group, who set both individual goals such as learning public speaking, facilitating and



Emery Wright (standing) leads an interactive planning session.

delegating skills, and collective goals, including leadership and strategy development, coalition building, group process and more.

Through exercises, the participants are learning new ways of thinking. Guilloud explained that during a role-playing exercise, "One participant planned a holiday party for students with disabilities. We pushed on - what are the goals? How do you know it will be successful, lead to other events or build trust in the community? It's not just the logistics of throwing a party; it's broader. How does hands-on, tangible work lead to a broader organizing project?"

"This group of people is really amazing. They will represent GCDD very well as they become fellows in their sponsoring organization."

This exercise encouraged the group to view the project as not only a fun party for children, but also as an opportunity to build lasting relationships with the community.

Another way the group learns together is by revisiting history. In one exercise, the group considered the Americans with Disabilities Act as the trunk of a tree. The actions, people, events and organizations that led to the act were the roots, and the leaves on the tree were results of the ADA being passed.

"We looked at the ADA to find relevance that can push our work forward. We spent a long time on the history to pull out strategies and tactics we can adjust and adapt to our own organizing plan. People talked about pushing forward legislation that advocates for people with disabilities, and different tactics to accomplish that goal - developing petitions, relationships and actual legislation with attorneys; direct action and mass action like a march," Guilloud said.

After two weekend sessions, Guilloud feels the institute is going well. "This group of people is really amazing. They will represent GCDD very well as they become fellows in their sponsoring organization,"

Once participants complete the institute, GCDD will still offer support for their projects. "We are making a long-term commitment to this effort, and we want to stay very, very connected to all those who participate," Jacobson said.

Mitchell believes the class will do well after graduation. "We hope participants will leave the institute with the skills and confidence to build relationships in their communities, to engage others in the issues they care about and to take action for lasting community change," she said. ●



**Jane Grillo
Family Member •
Sautee, Ga.**

Jane Grillo was already thinking ahead to a time when her son, who is five and has cerebral palsy, a visual impairment and a seizure disorder, would require transportation in their rural White County

community, when the opportunity to join the Organizing Institute came up.

She jumped at the chance. "I like to learn skills to help me be a better advocate. Especially in terms of bringing the community to the disability community instead of vice versa.

"I had been working on a couple of projects on my own, and one of them was a support group for families of special needs children. The other was seeing whether we could start a public transportation program in White County. I needed help in learning how to set up those types of things," she said.

After joining the Organizing Institute, she decided to create a respite program for families of children with disabilities through a new, local life skills and job training facility called Stepping Stone Farm. Currently, respite care for children is not available in White County, even though Georgia Mountain Community Services offers families up to \$1,000 per year to pay for them.

"I like to learn skills to help me be a better advocate."

Grillo has been recruiting special education teachers, parents and professional caregivers to serve as respite providers. Each provider must pass a background check and have CPR certification to participate. She is letting families know about the service through newspaper articles and by distributing flyers through special education teachers, and at grocery stores and public libraries. Board members of the Stepping Stone Farm are also spreading the word through community organizations such as Rotary Club.

"I have met some people involved in this effort that are just like me. They see a need in the community and realize there is a possibility they could make some change in creating a service where there is none," she said.

Patricia Underwood
Family Member • Peachtree City, Ga.

After her son experienced a spinal cord injury, Patricia Underwood turned to the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund (BSITF) for help. "I was impressed with the group's ability to directly help people with spinal cord injuries, instead of going through the typical government bureaucracy," she explained.

Underwood has chosen to work with the BSITF's commission for her project as part of the Organizing Institute. "I have always tried to be involved on an individual basis, and I saw this as an opportunity for outreach to a broader population," the Partners in Policymaking graduate said.

As a CPA, Underwood hopes to help the commission continue to collect the money it receives as a result of DUI fines. "They're having problems collecting court fees that are assessed right now," she said.



In addition, the Georgia legislature is considering capping fees on traffic fines, which could limit the amount of money coming into the trust. Underwood has already helped facilitate a meeting

between the commission and one of the senators working on the issue.

Underwood expects her participation in the Organizing Institute to help her with her project, as well as with her other advocacy efforts, such as helping parents navigate the complex Individualized Educational Program (IEP) process at school and serving on the IEP committees for students who don't have parents or advocates.

"I've learned (from the other members) you just have to keep trying, keep plugging away and never give up," she said.

"I have always tried to be involved on an individual basis, and I saw this as an opportunity for outreach to a broader population."



Barbaraann Bongiovanni
Self-Advocate and Family Member • Alpharetta, Ga.

Barbaraann Bongiovanni considers her participation in the Organizing Institute as a natural extension to

her Georgia Voices That Count training.

"In Georgia Voices I was an advocate and peer supporter. They gave us all the information. In the Organizing Institute, I'm using all that information to make a difference in the community," she said.

Bongiovanni will work with disABILITY LINK to help people transition from nursing homes to apartments or their family homes. She is also participating on a task force for special populations for the City of Roswell.

She has set high standards for herself. "I want to make a difference in the disability community. I want somebody else's life to be better. I want to lead. I want to be able to say, 'You need help? Just go here.' I want to be a Kate (Gainer, advocacy director for the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities). She has made such a positive life for herself and others."

The self-advocate also has high hopes for the other Organizing Institute participants. "After we start the fellowships, I'd love to see, about halfway through, how everyone's doing. See if we really did make a difference. I think that would be cool. I want to let the community know we're out there working for them."

"I want to be able to say, 'You need help? Just go here.'"

**William “Chase” Teate
Self-Advocate • Winder, Ga.**

A 16-year-old junior at Winder-Barrow High School, William “Chase” Teate is the youngest member of the Organizing Institute. As a student in the special education program at his school, Teate knows that support for rising sixth graders can make a huge impact on their success in high school and life.

“My view of the educational system is that by middle school you’ve indirectly determined your final direction in life. By helping students entering middle school do well and work out their strengths and weaknesses, they will do better in high school and life,” Teate explained.

The high schooler plans to set up a mentoring program that would match two seniors in the special education program with about 10 rising 6th graders each to help mentor. “These would be kids who could graduate, but due to outside issues, they are most at risk of dropping out or doing poorly in school,” he said.



“Mentors would let them know that despite their disabilities, they can achieve; they can do well. We would help them get their long and short-term goals organized.”

Teate will work with the board of education’s transition coordinator to help set up the pilot

program at his own school, and if it is successful, implement a similar program at the other high school in Barrow County. He is also trying to make the mentorship program a related vocational instruction apprenticeship so mentors could be paid for their participation.

Teate said he is enjoying learning how to successfully set up a project in his community. “It’s a lot of fun and energetic, but we’re still learning. It’s a lot more interactive than a school setting.”

“By helping students entering middle school do well and work out their strengths and weaknesses, they will do better in high school and life.”



**Caitlin Childs
Activist •
Atlanta, Ga.**

Caitlin Childs jumped at the opportunity to connect her social justice activism with disability work when she saw information about the Organizing Institute on an activist email list she receives.

“I’ve done a lot of activist organizing for a long time, but never focused on disability,” the veteran advocate explained.

Childs, a board member of Charis Circle, a nonprofit feminist organization that hosts informational and discussion sessions on a variety of topics, has experience with queer, anti-racist and intersex activism, and is looking forward to incorporating disability into what she has experienced in those areas.

While she is still working out the specifics of her project, Childs already has several ideas. “Charis Circle does programs that are free and open to public, like

“We have a do-it-yourself program – we could do one on how to make your house accessible. I’m still trying to figure out exactly what that’s going to look like.”

bringing authors in to read and social justice issues. I want to connect disability to other programs we’re doing already. We have a do-it-yourself program – we could do one on how to make your house accessible. I’m

still trying to figure out exactly what that’s going to look like,” she revealed.

Childs said while she has been organizing for a while, this is the first training she’s had. “Before, I just jumped in headfirst and learned by failing. Now I’m learning more formally how to organize,” she said.

Charis Circle is committed to an inclusive community, and Childs hopes that once disability is brought into the mix, it will be there to stay.

“Once I finish the (Organizing Institute), disability will continue to be a focus of Charis Circle,” she said.

Patricia Williams Self-Advocate • Atlanta, Ga.

A family history of disability advocacy, interest in self-employment for people with disabilities and personal experience with a slow vocational rehabilitation process spurred self-advocate Patricia Williams to apply to the Organizing Institute.

"I wanted to help myself and other people in the disability community to become more included in all areas of society. Particularly what I find lacking is self-employment for people with disabilities,"

Williams revealed.

She has found the training to be helpful. "My leadership skills and analytical skills have increased tremendously," she said.

A consultant who trains people to be entrepreneurs, Williams plans to partner with 9 to 5 Atlanta, an organization that promotes women's rights

in the employment arena. The organization works to combat job discrimination and improve family rights.

"I hope to complete the training with a solid plan of action to work in the general community to assure there is a raising of the level of awareness of the multitude of talents people with disabilities have. I also hope to join forces with people to bring some accountability to violation of disability laws," she said.

The Organizing Institute has been an enriching experience to Williams, and she hopes the program will continue on after this inaugural year. "The candidates who were selected all bring something very special and unique to the table, and we're all so enriched each time we come together. That's a very empowering experience," she said.



"I wanted to help myself and other people in the disability community to become more included in all areas of society."

Hallie "Queen" Cromartie Self-Advocate • Macon, Ga.

A trip to Disability Day (D-Day) a few years ago changed Queen Cromartie's life forever. "I saw the sea of people, and they blew me away. I said, 'Oh, my God, allow me to be their voice, be their advocate,'" she revealed.

Cromartie, who lived in a nursing home for 4.5 years finally moved into her own home after receiving assistance from Georgia's Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP). Since her trip to D-Day, she has been working toward her goal of helping others, graduating from Partners in Policy-making and taking training through the Georgia Advocacy Office before landing in the Organizing Institute, where she will work on transportation with Disability Connections.

"I would like to see people in a rural area be able to get hold of transportation," she explained. She is especially concerned that existing transportation is not maintained well and often wheelchair lifts don't operate.

"Sometimes people with disabilities can't go certain places because all the vans are down. I'm looking forward to changing or making accommodations," Cromartie said.

She also hopes to establish a forum where people in Bibb County can address transportation concerns. She has found her Organizing Institute training to be helpful in this area. "I've learned to be more aggressive in getting to the point, the bottom line, and always going to the top."

Denise Noseworthy Self-Advocate • LaFayette, Ga.

To Denise Noseworthy, advocating can be as easy as A-B-C, when you have the right tools and knowledge. Noseworthy, a certified peer specialist at Cornerstone, a service of Lookout Mountain Community Services in LaFayette, Ga., hopes to share what she's learned about advocacy with trainers across the state.

"I do self-advocacy training with the people I work with," explained the Georgia Voices That Count graduate. "My project is to start ABC – Advocating Brings Change."

Noseworthy envisions ABC as a statewide program. "The program would teach people how to use resources and how the system works, so more people can advocate for themselves. It's about being assertive. It's about compromise."

A former board member of the Mental Health Association of South Coastal Georgia, Noseworthy said the mental health community is often overlooked. "They don't know how to speak for themselves," she said.

Noseworthy is happy to be part of the Organizing Institute. "I'm able to get more skills from others – what works and what doesn't. I'm gaining tools I can bring back to the community I work in so they can become better advocates for themselves," she said.

Advocacy Training

MAKES A DIFFERENCE

When Jan Edelen's daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia, she researched ways she could help her child and others with disabilities excel in school, instead of just settling.

"Every child learns in a different way, and the one-size-fits-all school system isn't going to be appropriate for every child – that's when I decided to participate in the Parent Leadership Support Project (PLSP) program," she said.

PLSP is just one of many advocacy training programs offered by the Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO), a private nonprofit corporation whose mission is to work with and for oppressed individuals who have a disability or mental illness to secure their protection and advocacy.

GAO Executive Director Ruby Moore states, "There are over eight million people in the state of Georgia, and most citizens are not aware that people are segregated just for having a disability."

"There are over eight million people in the state of Georgia, and most citizens are not aware that people are segregated just for having a disability."

The GAO sponsors numerous types of community education and training events around Georgia on topics such as moving children out of institutions, guardianship, advocating for children's education in neighborhood schools, self-advocacy skills and voter and patient rights, often in conjunction with other organizations such as People First and the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund. These sessions are often intended to be living room-sized to better sustain shared learning

among advocates, but some have been regional or state-wide in size.

Moore revealed, "After the training, people step forward and ask, 'what can I do?' It's amazing what people can and will do if they have the awareness of what's going on and have the resources to take action."



Ruby Moore, right, discusses advocating for children in institutions with Zolinda Stoneman, Ph.D., of the Institute on Human Development and Disability.

The PLSP, a significant program offered by the GAO, is designed to train Georgia parents of children with disabilities, and other concerned citizens, to master information and negotiate systems to secure the educational opportunities that are mandated for children with disabilities. The PLSP program lasts approximately 13 weeks and consists of weekly presentations given by leading educational and legal experts.

Edelen, a December 2005 graduate of PLSP, explains that she took the training session to better understand what rights and opportunities her child had.

Edelen explained that one of most interesting things the advocacy training discusses is simply reminding people that everyone is an individual and that everyone has social roles.

“After the training, people step forward and ask, ‘what can I do?’”

“My child isn’t just a child with a disability. She’s a daughter, a sister, a niece, etc. – everyone needs the best quality of life they can have. We just need to work together to ensure these kids can get that quality of life,” Edelen said.

Leslie Lipson, an attorney with the GAO, runs the PLSP, and agrees that working together makes an impact. “There are about 200 past graduates of PLSP, and they’ve helped over 1,200 families. They stay very connected,” she explained.

Currently, many former PLSP graduates are using their training experience to participate in public meetings about the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), according to Lipson.

Edelen states that in taking the PLSP training session she now feels confident she can make a difference and that she knows what rights her child and other children are entitled to in assuring they have the best education available.

“I feel like I’m a part of the team with the teachers and the school to help my child learn and become an active member of society,” said Edelen. “I want to be an advocate for other children as well.”

Edelen is now the chairperson of Exceptional Children, a PTA program at a local elementary school that assures students with disabilities develop mentally, physically and emotionally through the provision of an appropriate individualized education in the least restrictive environment. ●

People interested in applying for the next PLSP training session, which will accept 30 participants, should complete a brief interest survey found on the GAO Web site, www.thegao.org/training.htm. For additional advocacy training sessions offered, please contact the GAO office at 404-885-1234.



The Road to Freedom Tour

By Nicole Galletta

The Road to Freedom Tour stopped in Atlanta December 15 – 18 during its year-long, cross-country bus journey to expose mainstream audiences to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Road to Freedom Tour brings awareness of the history of disability rights movement and the ongoing struggle for equal access to healthcare, transportation, education, employment and more.

Tour organizer Jim Ward, who serves as president of ADA Watch and the National Coalition for Disability Rights (NCDR), said work still needs to be done in the disability rights arena. “The empty accessible parking spots we see every day represent the people still locked up in institutions.

There are people that can’t go to the movies or can’t afford to eat out at restaurants because jobs weren’t created for them.

“Our job is not only to introduce and remind people of the struggles for equality among people with disabilities, but it is our hope that by traveling this beautiful country, we awaken and strengthen the spirit to promote change,” explained Ward.

The tour features an exhibit of national disability rights with photographs from photojournalist Tom Olin and newspaper articles and other items chronicling history-making civil rights movements made by people with disabilities.

Launched from Washington, D.C., the tour had already made its way to major cities in Maryland, New Jersey, South Carolina and North Carolina, before its two Atlanta stops at the main branch of the Atlanta Public Library and Shepherd Center. The tour is expected to make more than 80 stops, traveling to every state in the nation, in two highly visible RVs.

The tour is proudly presented by ADA Watch, a project of the National Coalition for Disability Rights (NCDR) based in Washington, D.C. The NCDR is a nonprofit alliance of hundreds of disability, civil rights, and social justice organizations united to defend and strengthen educational and economical opportunities for children and adults with disabilities.

For more information, visit www.adawatch.org/roadtofreedom.htm



(L to R) Kate Gainer, Jim Ward, Sen.-elect Nan Orrock (D-Atlanta), Eric Jacobson and Valerie Suber

Woman Buys Home with DCA Loan Assistance

By Michelle Aulthouse



Michelle Aulthouse, a self-advocate, has worked in the disability community for over 10 years, helping people learn to live independently. A graduate of Partners in Policymaking, Aulthouse has served as treasurer for People First of Atlanta and People First of Georgia, and has participated in two Long Road Home marches. She is currently a member of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

I've always thrived in achieving goals that many American men and women achieved throughout their lives, despite my disability. Within 10 years or so, I achieved four of my life goals. I got my Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. I accepted a job offer and moved to Norman, Okla., and four years later, I accepted another job offer and moved to Decatur, Ga., and then I fell in love and married my husband.

Four years ago, my husband, David, and I started to consider owning our own home. At the time we were living in a very nice one-bedroom apartment with our puppy, Rootbeer. David expressed some reservations about purchasing our own home. I suggested that we try getting a loan and find a home to purchase, and if we ran across any problems, then we would take it as a sign to stop, and we would stop and be happy living in our cozy little apartment. We agreed to begin to find out what steps we needed to take to find our own perfect house.

I found out that the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has a program for first time homebuyers for people with disabilities. I did research on what I had to do to get a DCA loan. All we had to do was call a mortgage company who handled DCA loans. I received two numbers of mortgage companies, and I picked one and called to set up an appointment to come in and speak to a mortgage agent.

David and I had our appointment at Unity mortgage to see if we qualified for a DCA loan and if we could afford our monthly payments. We got a yes to both questions. We had to provide our mortgage agent with a lot of information, such as my work pay stubs, my bank statements and other background information.

"I found out that the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has a program for first time homebuyers for people with disabilities."

From that point the ball started rolling. Denise, our mortgage agent, connected us with a realtor, KC, who works with GMAC Real Estate and gave us a book to read about the homebuying process. Both Denise and

KC were great. They had our best interest at heart. They really wanted us to have our own home. We looked at about 20 houses and made bids that were rejected on two houses, before we found our perfect house in Stone Mountain. By then, we had been looking for

about two months. As soon as I walked into the front entrance, I knew this was the perfect house for us. We made a bid, and it was accepted!! Before the closing, we paid for someone to do an inspection to make sure the house was in good shape. On December 22, David and I went to our closing at a lawyer's office, and I signed the deed and so many papers that I thought I was signing my life away. We left the lawyer's office with the keys to our perfect house. We were both feeling very excited that day. In early January, we moved into our new home.

I know my home buying experience is very rare due to the fact I didn't run into one problem when I was trying to get the DCA loan. I have heard several stories about people having trouble getting a DCA loan, but I didn't.

David and I have been in our house three years. We love our house. We have had some hardships along the way, such as a plumbing issue that needed to be fixed; our furnace breaking down; and lightning striking our roof. But we are managing the house just fine even with all these hardships that came our way. We are very blessed. ●

Two different paths lead to homeownership.

Family Support Helps Man Live Independently

By Ruth Lee Clendon Langevin

My son Chip Clendon was 30 years old and living at home in Maryland with us. A supported living waiver was available, but we were told that men did not usually do well in supported living. After several attempts to get the waiver, many meetings and volumes of paperwork going nowhere, I wrote a letter to the governor of Maryland, William Donald Schaffer. Three months later, the first supported living apartment for men was established in Salisbury, Md. Chip moved in on November 1, 1993.

In 1996, my husband retired, and we moved to Georgia after being assured that anything Maryland could do, Georgia could do. Not so! The philosophy of how individuals should live and flourish in their own homes was just not there.

Shortly after moving here, we met Tom Nolan and his mother Derenn Bell. An instant friendship developed, and Chip and Tom moved in together in an apartment in Athens. Both men attained jobs, Tom at Winn Dixie and Chip at Five Points Deli and More. They received supportive services from the local community service board (CSB), including help with grocery shopping, meal planning and occasional social outings. They found they were not compatible personality-wise. The two families decided to buy condos at the opposite ends of the building for the men. Tom received a personal loan for first time homeowners with a disability. We made the decision to buy Chip's condo for him. This gave both men their own homes, while maintaining their friendship and privacy. They decided to take turns every Wednesday preparing a meal to share, a practice that continues to this day.

During this period, the services being provided by the CSB were erratic, so the families approached Georgia Options, a nonprofit agency in Athens that supports people with disabilities to live in their own homes and have typical life experiences, for help. The

agency agreed to provide supportive services. This arrangement has worked out very well. Georgia Options respects the person being served and nourishes community involvement and talents.

After working at Five Points Deli and More for eight years, Chip became ill and was no longer able to work. He was diagnosed with an atrial septal defect in his heart and required surgery. Shortly afterwards he was diagnosed with diabetes 2, hypertension and high cholesterol, all requiring medication, diet monitoring and daily blood tests.

It also became apparent at this time that the neighborhood that he and Tom were living in was becoming less desirable as a home. The families decided to purchase two townhouses in a small community across the street from one another.

With help from the Athens Vocational Rehabilitation, Chip now has a new job at the University of Georgia working in the kitchen at Oglethorpe Dining Hall. He takes the bus to work and is within walking distance of his bank, a movie theatre and a mall. Chip enjoys his own life and the freedom to live it. Georgia Options fills in the gaps. They provide a wonderful young man who helps Chip with his grocery shopping, is a confidant, makes sure that his home is safe and well cared for and takes him and Tom out to attend plays, musicals and other events. Chip also attends church every Sunday. Chip is very happy with HIS life. He loves to come home for holidays and enjoys being with his family and appreciates family visiting him in his home. We are always respectful that it is HIS home and HIS life.

As a parent, I would like to say that this has not always been an easy process, more trial and error. There have been financial sacrifices and sleepless nights and crying binges, questioning myself as to whether or not I am doing the right thing. I firmly believe that my son has a right to live and enjoy his own life, to make mistakes and learn from them. He is doing that, and I will always support him. ●

“Georgia Options has the philosophy of individualism and respect for the person being served and nourishes community involvement and talents.”



A retired nurse, Ruth Lee Clendon Langevin continues to advocate for her son, Chip, who has cognitive disabilities. She has served as president of the Lower Shore Mental Health Association, on the Citizen's Advisory Board for the Eastern Shore State Hospital and the Georgia Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Chip Clendon, who is 44, lives in his own home, is employed 30 hours a week at one of the dining halls at the University of Georgia, is able to use the city bus system to and from work and is within walking distance of his bank, a mall and movie theatre. He receives support from Georgia Options, a private, non-profit provider, with his meal planning and grocery shopping. He manages his medication and medical needs with the help of his mother.

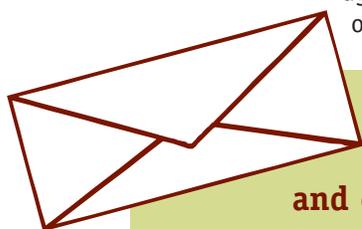
GCDD Sets Legislative Priorities

FOR 2007 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

By Deputy Director Patricia Nobbie, D.P.A.

It is hard to believe that a full year has passed since the previous legislative session! But here we are again, surveying the budget and legislative landscape, reviewing the outcomes of the elections and changes in leadership and listening to the advocates. At the October Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities meeting, held in Savannah, issues were submitted to Council members for their consideration, and the group determined its priorities.

GCDD's agenda setting process engages a broad constituency of organizations and individuals involved with disability advocacy. In September, letters were sent to approximately 35 agencies and organizations representing a variety of disability-related activities, inviting them to



In September, letters were sent to approximately 35 agencies and organizations representing a variety of disability-related activities, inviting them to submit the budget or legislative issues on which they would be focused during the legislative session.

submit the budget or legislative issues on which they would be focused during the legislative session. The issue had to have some impact on the community of people with developmental

disabilities; be in concert with GCDD mission, vision and values; capitalize on the expertise of GCDD; and be an issue on which GCDD could constructively use its limited resources. We received input from more than a dozen organizations, and we sought information from a few state agencies that we knew were working on items that would affect individuals with disabilities. These items were summarized and explained to the Council members in October, and through a show of hands, were separated into 5 tiers of action: initiate; active support; support by name; remain neutral; and oppose.

In addition, as GCDD just completed its five-year work plan, several of the legislative priorities are issues that Council members determined need our top tier priority status. These action items are listed in Tier I below.

The following discussion presents the items on our legislative agenda to date, and the recommended level of support. Keep in mind the activities of the legislative session are a moving target, and our attention to particular issues is always subject to change. For that reason, an ad hoc Public Policy Committee was established of Council members, who will meet by phone each week to review the events of that week, make adjustments to the agenda and advise me. GCDD will be supported at the Capitol by several individuals who are working on particular budget items or legislation.

It is also important to note that although revenue collections for the state have been well above prior year levels for most of the year, the governor's budget instructions to the agencies were flat funding, which means any enhancements in the budget had to come from within agencies' current budgets with no new dollars. Agencies were allowed to submit enhancement requests separately. The revenue estimate is subject to change, and we will be paying close attention to further guidance from the governor's office.



Tier I: GCDD Initiates

Unlock the Waiting Lists!: Request is 2,000 MRWP slots, \$19,072,449 state funding for 12 months.

The Unlock the Waiting Lists! campaign is guided by House Resolution 1307, which sets out a five-year funding plan to reduce the list to a “reasonable pace.” We are in the third year of that plan, and the legislature has done well in the past two years funding the recommended number of services; 925 of the recommended 1000 the first year; and 1,500 services funded for six months last session (recommendation was 1,500). This year, the recommendation is 2,000 slots, and this will be a challenge. The flat funding budget instructions mean that the Department of Human Resources (DHR) could only propose 170 waiver

This year, the recommendation is 2,000 slots, and this will be a challenge.

services that could be funded with existing dollars. However, DHR did submit an enhancement request that proposed funding for 1,000, 1,500 and 1,830 services, of which the last proposed level would bring the total to 2,000, meeting the goals of the multi-year funding plan. The funding of 2,000 services was fully supported by the DHR board in its August meeting. Therefore, GCDD and the Unlock the Waiting Lists! campaign will be advocating for the funding of 2,000 new waiver services. The enhancement request also includes funds to establish the necessary infrastructure to support individuals in the community such as support coordination, intake and evaluation, person-centered planning, employment initiatives, behavioral and nursing services and medications, for example.

Money Follows the Person: The Department of Community Health (DCH), with the collaboration

of DHR and numerous organizations involved in long-term care, submitted a proposal to move individuals from state hospitals and nursing homes under an opportunity in the federal Deficit Reduction Act. GCDD contributed funds to pay a grant writer to pull the proposal together. The Money Follows Person Rebalancing Initiative provides states with an enhanced federal share of the Medicaid costs for the first 12 months of an individual’s life outside an institution as a way of providing an incentive to states to move people into the community. Georgia will plan to move 650 individuals with developmental disabilities from state hospitals over the next three years. In GCDD’s five-year plan, the goal is to get legislation passed by 2011 for money to follow persons out of institutions to communities.

Medicaid Buy-In: In the last legislative session, the General Assembly directed DCH to work up the costs for a proposed Medicaid Buy-In program. A buy-in would enable individuals with disabilities to seek and maintain competitive employment and salaries without jeopardizing their health benefits

through sharing the cost of their Medicaid coverage, like paying an insurance premium. Cost projections are complete; the estimated cost in the DCH budget ranges from \$1 million to \$2.8 million depending on the number of people to be covered and other actuarial variables, but approximately \$3,000,000.



Children’s Freedom Initiative: A resolution to move all children under the age of 21 from state hospitals, nursing homes and private Intermediate Care Facilities – Mental Retardation (ICF-MRs) was passed in the 2005 session. Last year, the legislature appropriated funds for enough waiver services to support the movement of 44 children from the state hospitals. This work has begun, and we want to ensure that the legislature continues to allocate enough funding to move the rest of the children without compromising the budget needed to support adults with developmental disabilities in the community. In the next few years, GCDD will begin conversations about legislation to close the front door of institutions, so in the future, no child will grow up in an institution because that was the only option.

Education Issues: Under No Child Left Behind, students with disabilities made tremendous gains in every subject area and every grade in the last year. GCDD is focused on three areas of concern, which may not come up this session, but we are still vigilant. First, we support the design of alternative tracks to the standard diploma. The special education diploma closes off too many options for students with disabilities. Second, we support the development of a funding formula that facilitates the inclusion of students with

disabilities in the general education curriculum. We are watching the work of the ie2, the governor’s quality basic education finance task force. Third, we are concerned about teacher quality and training especially for students with significant disabilities, so we are tracking any education initiatives that would affect certification, professional development and retention of special education teachers.

Election Code: HB 1435, passed last year, made some major improvements to the voting process for people with disabilities, particularly those who requested poll assistance. Some corrections need to be made to the section of the code affected by this legislation, and we are working toward a less restrictive definition of disability.

Tier II: GCDD Actively Supports

Service Provider Rates: The reimbursement rates for providers in the developmental disabilities arena do not keep pace with the cost of providing high quality, stable care. The Service Providers Association for Developmental Disabilities (SPADD) is seeking a 4.5% increase to Grant-in-Aid (state) funds used for services to individuals

The reimbursement rates for providers in the developmental disabilities arena do not keep pace with the cost of providing high quality, stable care.

who are not Medicaid eligible, such as flexible family supports, and increasing the salaries of direct support staff. The request comes to approximately \$2.8 million. The providers are also seeking a 4% consumer rate increase for all services, Medicaid and non-Medicaid, to keep pace with inflation, and provide cost of living increases to direct care staff.

TBI/SCI Funding: The Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund is requesting a \$500,000 line item in the state budget to allow it to assist an additional 75 - 125 Georgians every year, administer the central registry and continue to provide individualized support with the application process.



Reintroduce E-Text Legislation: The proposed legislation would cover students with print access disabilities, that is students on the secondary level at all public and private postsecondary institutions, including tech schools and proprietary schools, who must be accommodated under the Americans with Disabilities Act or Rehabilitation Act. The legislation defines electronic versions of instructional materials, requiring structural integrity, including graphs, charts and tables. The Learning Disability Association of Georgia has begun to educate students on legislative strategies, and the plan is to reintroduce a bill and start the conversation again.

Tier III: GCDD Supports in Name

For the following list of initiatives, GCDD will allow its name to be used as a supporter of the initiative, but will otherwise take no direct action.

- Support Georgia Alliance on Direct Support Professionals for DSP Recognition Day at the Capitol.
- Support the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in their request for \$575,000 for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities. NORCs allow seniors to remain at home for as long as possible through the provision of community supports. This allocation would be in the DHR budget.
- Support the Tools for Independence project to establish an assistive technology project in each Center for Independent Living and support funding for a new CIL in Columbus that would coordinate the project. The project is headed by the State Independent Living Council with Tools for Life. The allocation would be in the Department of Labor budget.
- Support the effort to raise the Georgia minimum wage to \$7 per hour, led by the Living Wage Coalition and others. The effort in Congress to raise the minimum wage will help here, but only wages for employees in businesses that fall under the Interstate Commerce Act would be raised. This bill would affect all workers in Georgia.
- Support passage of the Time For Schools Act that would provide job-protected leave for parents to attend meetings or events at their child's school. This legislation will be reintroduced and is being supported by the Working Families Coalition.

- Reintroduce legislation, formerly SB 248 from the 2006 session, that would reallocate employment-related resources for people who are blind or who are deaf and blind to improve access and services.
- Establish a Commission for the Blind: These were HB 1420 and SB 621 respectively, and will need to be reintroduced.
- Require teachers of people who are blind be literate in Braille.
- Create legislation that would increase fines and penalties for harming a guide dog while working.



Currently, GCDD has no items in the “neutral” or “oppose” tiers. We will also be watching several issues on the healthcare front: changes in dental services and rates in the Medicaid budget; implementation of the Care Management Organizations and the provider issues that have arisen there; prior authorization for therapies for children in the Babies Can't Wait and Katie Beckett populations; and the movement of PeachCare for All Kids, a bill that will expand health insurance to children. In the areas of revenue, we will be tracking the work that has been done on reforming Georgia's Tax Code, and any efforts to pass legislation that would limit the growth on government services by installing a cap. We also never know what might come up!

Weekly updates on the legislative session are provided in *Moving Forward*, so make sure you are on the mailing or e-mail list to receive it. Find out who your legislators are (there are some new ones!) by going on www.vote-smart.org, and enter your 9-digit zip code. Take the time to contact your legislator, particularly if he or she is new, so you can share the family member or self-advocate perspective. Lastly, mark your calendars for February 22, Disability Day at the Capitol, the biggest advocacy day during the session. ●

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Welcome Home

“Welcome Home” isn’t a doormat seen often at institutions. But more people living in institutions and nursing homes will have a reason to feel more at home in the near future. That’s because the state is funding waivers to help people move out of institutions and into homes in the community.

Community integration is a response to the Supreme Court’s 1999 Olmstead Decision, which

“I do whatever I can to get that person back into the community, stabilized and with all the things they need to be independent.”

mandated that people with disabilities have the right to live

in integrated community settings with state support instead of being segregated in institutions and nursing homes.

Though a great victory for the disability community, other barriers still need to be overcome.

“The most important and the most challenging [task] is assisting them in finding housing,” Norma Asheber of disABILITY LINK explained. The transition supervisor assists people with disabilities in finding housing and start-up related items. Some of the organization’s services include identifying accessible apartment complexes or homes for rent or ownership; helping with paperwork; finding start-up household items like beds, coffee makers, etc.; and even referring service providers if the client has an independent care waiver or Medicaid waiver.

“I do whatever I can to get that person back into the community, stabilized and with all the things they need to be independent,” Asheber said, including accessible and affordable housing. Some say that’s like finding a needle in a haystack.

But Asheber disagrees, “I think it’s there, we just need to find it.”

The five-year home hunter’s secret is face time. “I get out there and interact with the apartment folks, and I’m able to get people in,” she explained, admitting that she avoids submitting applications until she meets apartment managers in person. “They need to see a face, they need to know there is a need and they can fill it.”

Asheber finds her personal touch has helped some of her clients skip waiting lists all together. Staying in touch with her contacts includes sending thank you notes, Christmas cards and just dropping by to say “hello.”

She also takes the time to tour potential abodes, ensuring they meet her clients’ needs. She acknowledges some landlords will inaccurately claim a living space is accessible after having made minimal upgrades, but insists there are plenty of accessible and affordable spaces to be found in the metro Atlanta area.

Recently, one of Asheber’s clients benefited from one of her relationships. A new client, a 52-year-old man with muscular dystrophy, and his older brother with the same condition, needed to find a wheelchair-accessible apartment. When Asheber learned one of the brothers was being abused, she knew she had to move fast. Usually, it can take several weeks to several months to find a home, but through her network, the brothers were moved in within a week. The rent was slightly above their budget, but she’s currently working on a Section 8 home assistance application that will help with the difference.



Johnny Merrit had lost his self-respect while living in a nursing home. With the help of transition supervisor Norma Asheber, he now enjoys living independently in a Dalton, GA apartment.



Tina Dayton's home was built with the love of Habitat for Humanity volunteers.

A Home of Her Own

Tina Dayton, a 30-something woman, has always dreamed of owning a home. She applied to Habitat for Humanity®, but even with the organization's deep financial contributions, the monthly payments would still be a little too high. But the Habitat employee working with Dayton, Harold Desseldorf, wanted to make it work. He contacted the Macon Housing Authority who got their proven partner, Disability Connections, involved as well.

"This was a woman who had all the attributes you want to see in a first time homebuyer," said John Hiscox, executive director of the Macon Housing Authority.

Hiscox explained that in 1998, Congress passed a housing act allowing the housing authorities to use Section 8 vouchers in support of home ownership, not just rental housing. So the Macon authority

"This was a woman who had all the attributes you want to see in a first time homebuyer."

worked with Habitat and Disability Connections to come up with a financial package that made home ownership feasible for Dayton.

"Not too many people think it can happen, but the Lord just provided it all," the new homeowner said.

A Light Bulb Moment

This isn't the first time Disability Connections and the Macon Housing Authority have collaborated. In 2005, the partners won the Department of Community Affairs' Magnolia Award for Excellence in Affordable Housing. The joint award honored the cooperative spirit of the organizations in assisting low-income people with disabilities become more independent.

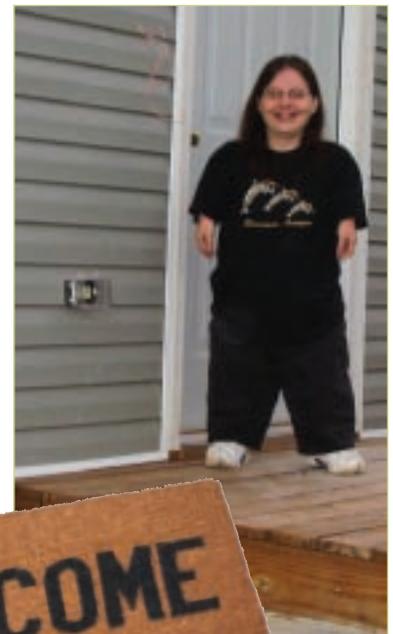
Like many brilliant solutions, the partnership sprung out of necessity – a "catch 22" that was keeping people from moving out of nursing homes. According to Jerilyn Leverett of Disability Connections, people in nursing homes would apply for waivers that would provide them with the services they needed to live outside the nursing home, often ending up on a long waiting list.

When a consumer in a nursing home makes it to the top of the waiting list and becomes enrolled in the Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP), he or she can lose the waiver if services are not used within 180 days. The waiver recipient cannot start using personal support services while living in the nursing home. That means once consumers are awarded independent care waivers, they have less than 180 days to find housing and begin using services. The window of time is even smaller for people who are not coming out of nursing homes – 60 days.

Leverett said the consumers would then apply for Section 8 vouchers, only to end up on another long waiting list. Then the waivers for services would expire.

The same situation could happen the other way as well, as the Section 8 voucher has a 120-day window to begin use. If a consumer came to the top of the list for housing assistance, he or she would most likely not have been awarded the needed ICWP or other Medicaid waivers.

Tina Dayton's dream of homeownership came true with help from Habitat for Humanity, the Macon Housing Authority and Disability Connections.





People with physical disabilities can easily enter the “visitable” clubhouse at East Lake Commons, a town home community in Decatur. Renovating a home to be visitable can cost thousands, but building one from scratch might cost just a few extra dollars for a wider doorframe and door.

“This is classic bureaucratic stupidity,” Hiscox said. Luckily, Hiscox, Leverett and their teams found a way to bridge the two programs.

It turns out that housing authorities are enabled to award some local priorities for Section 8. “We gave priority to people with disabilities who had obtained a waiver to help them locate housing and negotiate any changes to housing with the landlord,” Hiscox said. “The savings to the federal government have been large, and these people have a good quality of

“The savings to the federal government have been large, and these people have a good quality of life.”

life. It’s the sort of thing that taxpayers want to find you doing.”

Another problem with the Section 8 housing vouchers was that applicants with disabilities found locating accessible apartments or homes within the

specified window of time difficult.

“We began developing a list of accessibility features in different apartments,” Leverett explained. “The Housing Authority started using our list, too.” Additionally, Disability Connections helps speed up the Section 8 application process for its clients by providing the Macon Housing Authority with birth certificates and proof of income and/or SSI benefits.

Give Her Some Credit

People with disabilities are subject to the same rules as everyone else when it comes to loans. Consumer

Credit Counseling Services, a nonprofit company that offers free and confidential credit counseling in Atlanta, works with people to fix credit so they can buy a home in the future.

“A mortgage is dictated on your ability to pay – it’s whatever your fixed income is – disability, supplemental security or help up front from a mom or a dad,” said Todd Mark, a spokesman for the organization.

Credit has become a big question for some people considering homeownership as an option for themselves or family members with disabilities.

For example, Bruce Lindemann of Atlanta recently began considering home ownership as an option for his 23-year-old daughter, Carla Lindemann, when she’s a little older. A member of the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities, his curiosity was sparked when he learned of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs’ (DCA) Dream Homeownership CHOICE (Consumer Home Ownership for Independence, Choice and Empowerment) loan program.

In addition to low interest rates on home loans, eligible applicants can qualify for \$7,500 to \$20,000, depending on the size of income, for help with down payments, closing costs or insurance and taxes in escrow. (More information at dcaloans.com or 800-359-4663.)

If eligible, Lindemann’s daughter would have access to low interest loans and some seed money for closing costs. But the more he considered the possibilities, the more impossible it seemed. Even if his daughter qualified for the program, she has no credit history. Would a bank give her a loan? And would his daughter still be eligible for the low-interest program if he and his wife get the loan instead?

According to Beth Spears from the DCA office of Home Ownership, the DCA will accept a co-signed bank loan from the applicant in certain circumstances. The co-signer could not take title to the property, and in most cases, even live on the property. That’s because the co-signer’s income level could possibly be above the limit for eligible applicants.

Creative Housing Solutions

Although home ownership is an option for some, that doesn’t mean everyone needs to own a home to be “free.”

“It doesn’t matter whether they rent or own the home just as long as they have a say in their lives,” said Mary Kissel, interim director of Georgia Options, located in Northeast Georgia.



The 14-year old organization supports people with disabilities so they can live in their own homes, enjoying typical life experiences.

“Georgia Options was a trailblazer [in Georgia] in figuring out how people could live on their own,” Kissel said.

After researching supported living by visiting agencies in other states and collaborating with a few state experts, Georgia Options opened its doors and was able to serve its first clients, including Kissel’s son.

A man with cerebral palsy and several other disabilities, Eric Kissel moved into a rental home at the age of 25. Mr. Kissel’s supplemental security income (SSI) covered part of the rent and utilities. Requiring around-the-clock care, he sub-leased a bedroom to a live-in companion, which helped pay the remainder of the rent and utilities and provided him with 24-hour support.

Financially, the living situation worked. However, the house wasn’t 100 percent accessible. Unable to find other accessible rental homes in the area, the family considered renovating the bathroom for a staggering \$8,000 – a steep investment on a home they didn’t own. So they looked into home ownership. What they found was surprising. For less than the costs of the rental renovation, Mr. Kissel could become a homeowner. So he did.

Because his credit history was non-existent, Mr. Kissel’s parents co-signed the loan with him. Acting as landlords, they pay taxes and keep up with the maintenance on the house.

Eventually, the live-in companion wanted a home of his own. Still needing assistance with paying the mortgage, Mr. Kissel found a roommate with similar disabilities who could benefit from the accessible features of the house. According to support providers at Georgia Options, it is harder to find live-in companions now than it has been in the past, and finding a roommate who does not provide services is a more likely scenario.

Owning his home has not affected Mr. Kissel’s ability to receive supplementary income and Mental Retardation Waiver Program benefits, as SSI depends on income, not homeownership. His roommate pays rent directly to the mortgage company so that it doesn’t increase his income.

Fourteen years later, Mr. Kissel is still living on his own with 24-hour support. His mom admits that there were a few bumps in the road along the way to homeownership, though.

“When we got to the closing, the attorney realized we were Eric’s legal guardians, but he didn’t want to move forward because we were entering into debt [under his name],” Mrs. Kissel said. “The lawyer forced us to go through probate court and get approval.”

The family presented their case to the judge and were approved to enter into debt in their son’s name. The family also learned about the Estate Recovery Act. Under the law, the state collects the assets of a person who dies to recoup the costs of Medicaid waivers and other forms of public assistance they received while living. This has been an issue of consternation and public debate for years, but



Eric Kissel has lived successfully in his own accessible home for over 13 years.

“It doesn’t matter whether they rent or own the home just as long as they have a say in their lives.”

Mrs. Kissel has a different way of looking at

the law. “We’re okay with this,” she said. “To us, that’s a wonderful reciprocal deal.”

The Kissels have also discussed how Mr. Kissel will continue living autonomously after they die. They plan to set up a special needs trust for him that will include paying for house maintenance, taxes and insurance. Ideally, the trust would be funded from a third of their assets when they die, the other two thirds benefiting their other children. They’re not planning on going anywhere yet, though. Recently, they refinanced the house and realized it would be paid off by the their 75th birthdays.

But, Mrs. Kissel pointed out, living autonomously doesn’t necessarily mean owning a home, it can mean renting as well. What’s important is the ability for persons with disabilities to live in the community.

See page 30 for resources on renting or owning a home, loan programs, nonprofit credit counselors and supported living services in Georgia. ●

Please share your thoughts about accessible and affordable housing with GCDD by emailing sumitchell@dhr.state.ga.us

StraightTalk

Woman Leaves Nursing Home After Nine Years

By Valerie Smith Buxton

Hope Browning wanted her independence so badly that she was willing to move away from her family in Dublin, Ga., to an apartment in Macon, 55 miles away.

Browning, who has paraplegia, moved to a nursing home in 1996 after both her legs were amputated. Because there are limited services available for people with disabilities in Dublin, she ended up living in the nursing home for nine years.

A social worker passed Browning's name to Disability Connections, a center for independent living in Macon, and Tina Hopper, a peer supporter, visited her to discuss her needs.

"When they first mentioned moving to Macon, I thought, 'I'm not doing that!' I finally came around to the idea. If moving to Macon would get me out of the nursing home, I was going to Macon," Browning said.

The process of moving into her own apartment took Browning about a year.

"Disability Connections came down to Dublin, picked me up and brought me to Macon to look for apartments," she said.

The organization has worked with the Macon Housing Authority to better manage any Section 8 housing assistance given to people with disabilities, according to Hopper. "We have a Memorandum of Understanding to help people move out of nursing homes quicker," she explained.

Hopper said that sometimes housing becomes available before the person has other support services in place, or vice versa. The agreement between Disability Connections and the Macon Housing Authority helps people move a little faster into housing once their other services are put in place.

In addition, Disability Connections helped Browning apply for support assistance. As a result,



Browning enjoys cooking the food she loves in her own home.

Browning receives cleaning, errands and grocery shopping support through SOURCE.

Browning admits she was a little nervous at first about living on her own again. "Coming to Macon on my own, without any family here – that was the scariest thing for me, I think."

Once she moved to Macon, the transition to independent living was not always easy. Hopper said that at first, "Her Medicaid still showed she was living in a nursing home, so she was unable to get SOURCE Care Management services, which allow her help with cleaning house and personal needs. We got Georgia Legal Services involved, but it took a couple of months to get resolved."

Browning also reported some problems with Macon's disability transit system. "The first time I went shopping, the van left me. I'm in Macon, don't know anyone, and they left me. Who do you call? Luckily someone came in that I knew. Things like that have happened," Browning revealed.

**"I have the freedom to go
and come as I please."**

But despite some glitches, she is enjoying her life more. "I have the freedom to go and come as I please. I'm in charge of myself; no one is making decisions for me. It's all up to me now," she said.

Hopper still checks in with Browning, who celebrated her first year of freedom in October, about once a month. "She had some hills to climb, but once (the Medicaid issue) was resolved, everything fell into place. She's been doing really well."

Now that Browning has adjusted to her new life, she's ready to tackle additional challenges. "I would like to get out more, meet more people. That's something I've got to work on. I'd like to do some volunteer work or something of that nature," she said. ●



**“COMING TO
Macon
ON MY OWN,
without ANY
family here
- that was the
SCARIEST THING
for me...”**



HOMEOWNERSHIP: Creating Independent Living Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities

By Jacqueline Wilks-Weathers

Living independently and the ability to build assets toward a secure future is a fundamental part of the American dream. Homeownership creates stronger families, improves communities and increases individual independence. Perhaps most importantly, owning your own home ensures that you have the opportunity to live in a neighborhood of your choice. For people with disabilities, homeownership can mean more stability, self-determination and self-control of one's housing options.

While the process of navigating through the homeownership process can be frustrating – even intimidating at times – there are many resources available to help individuals achieve the American dream. The first step is to know and understand your credit score. A FREE copy of your credit report is available online at www.annualcreditreport.com.

1
The first step is to know and understand your credit score.

This report does not include your credit score, but that can be purchased separately for a nominal fee. Your credit score ranges between 300 and 850. This score is calculated using 5 indicators:

- Payment History
- Accounts Owed
- Length Of Credit History
- New Credit
- Types of Credit in Use

The average credit score for Georgia residents is 668, while the national average is slightly higher at 677. There are a couple of things you can do to raise your credit score and to keep it high:

- Always pay your bills on time.
- Pay down the total amount that you owe.
- Keep credit cards that you have had a long time, but don't open new accounts or accept higher limits when you don't need them.

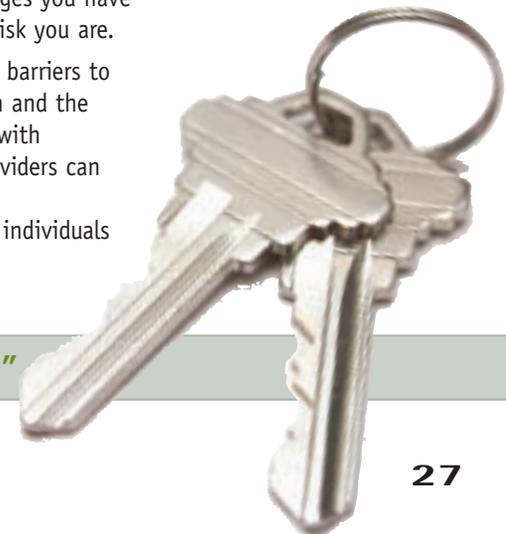
If you are considering buying a home or making another major purchase, get copies of your credit report at least six months prior to the purchase. There are three credit reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion). Be certain to review your reports carefully for errors. If you find a mistake, you have the right to challenge items on your credit report – the credit bureaus have 30 days to review your request and to decide whether that item should be removed. Keep in mind, however, that once you correct an error on one report, you will have to do the same on the other two.

For consumers who have never had credit in their own name, it may be difficult to get a loan with an affordable rate. However, there are a few things you can do to build a good credit history:

- Demonstrate financial responsibility – one way to do this is by opening a checking account (if you don't already have one) and be careful not to overdraw or bounce checks; also, if you rent an apartment, make sure you pay your rent and utilities in full and on time.
- Get a specific kind of credit card – some credit cards are easy to obtain even without established credit (for example, a gas card); apply for one and pay off the balance each month; if you are unable to obtain a credit card on your own, find a qualified (and trustworthy) co-signer.
- Maintain a stable lifestyle – some creditors consider other factors when determining your credit worthiness, including how often you move or change jobs; the more changes you have made, the greater a financial risk you are.

While there are many financial barriers to homeownership, careful preparation and the collaborative efforts of individuals with disabilities, lenders and service providers can help to overcome these obstacles – homeownership is a real choice for individuals with disabilities. ●

Jacqueline Wilks-Weathers currently serves as the director of Credit-Able, Georgia's Alternative Financing Program for Assistive Technology. Credit-Able works collaboratively with the Georgia Department of Labor, Georgia credit unions and disability service organizations to give individuals with disabilities access to affordable financial products and services. Wilks-Weathers holds a Master of Public Administration from New Mexico State University with a concentration in public policy as well as Bachelors degrees in Sociology and Religion from Wofford College in Spartanburg, SC. She has worked in the nonprofit sector for 11 years with an emphasis on program management and resource development.



"...homeownership is a real choice for individuals with disabilities."



“Everyday People” require Community Capacity

By Patricia Nobbie, D.P.A, Mia's Mom

While we are generally optimistic about the future, as parents, we have to wonder, “What will really happen?”

A few weeks ago, some of our colleagues came to the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities office to present the Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) for Georgia, a comprehensive schema for the development of quality of life in the community for people with developmental disabilities they developed at the International Inclusion Conference in Toronto. The PATH, titled “Everyday People” is a beautiful pictorial narrative of the ideal continuum of services and supports from birth to death, through early intervention, schooling, transition to the community, work and recreation, worship and participation.

I have to admit I was less than enthusiastic, not because of the design, which was wonderful and affirming, or the commitment of the presenters to the whole vision. I was skeptical because no vision can be realized without resources to develop the capacity in the community to support people with developmental disabilities as they live, work and play.

At 22, Mia is working 20 hours a week in a professional setting that provides her with the social network, compensation and purpose that developmental disability experts say is key to any person's life. She volunteers in Sunday school and attends Saturday camp with people her age. She goes to Curves. She has a cell phone with job coaches and friends on speed dial. She arranges her own transportation.

When you ask her what's next, she says she wants her own apartment. At the GCDD quarterly meeting, where housing experts shared the options available to people with disabilities, Mia raised her hand and stated her goals – to have her own apartment, with her own refrigerator and food, her own bed and desk, computer and TV, and, this she said with great emphasis and determination, “my own keys.”



I fully support the idea of Mia living in her own apartment. But the reality for any parent, even with a visionary PATH, is this: supporting Mia safely in the community is the equivalent of paying private college tuition for one of my typical children, every year, for the rest of her life. How will we manage this? Here's another reality. The waiting list in Georgia is 6,500 people long, and grows by 1,100 each year. The Department of Human Resources, without the governor's added support, will be able to add only 170 waiver services this year. Mia has a day support waiver that covers her job coach and community integration activities, but she remains on the list for residential and personal support. We are a low risk family, so it'll be awhile before Mia's need rises above another's. I am also very conflicted about our needs. I don't want to depend on the state. We work hard, and we've taken care of Mia without much help; in fact, for her first 12 years, the only service we received was one year in Early Intervention before we opted, at considerable sacrifice, to put her in a Montessori program so she could be educated with typical kids in a language rich environment. But I'll trade: in exchange for

“When you ask her what's next, she says she wants her own apartment.”

some modest assistance to help Mia live independently, she'll continue to go to work, volunteer, worship, contribute. My husband and I will stay in the taxpaying citizenry. We'll educate our other children, who will also become taxpayers. We will all contribute.

There will be no PATH for Georgia without the purposeful allocation of resources, over several years, to develop capacity in the community. The great minds have shared their expertise; we all get it, we can plan and plan again, have forums and discussions and retreats, and visions and memos of the visions, but without the legislature, and the “everyday” citizens in every Georgia community believing that the Mias of this state can live, work and play as “everyday people,” AND that we will all be the richer for it, then all we have is a nice picture for the office wall. ●

JANUARY

January 18-19
Governor's Council on
Developmental Disabilities
Quarterly Council Meeting
 Atlanta, GA • 888-ASK-GCDD
www.gcdd.org

January 24-27
ATIA 2007
 Orlando, FL • 877-687-2842
www.atia.org

FEBRUARY

February 1-3
TRLD, Technology, Reading
& Learning Diversity
 San Francisco, CA • 800-999-4660
www.trld.com

February 22
Disability Day at the Capitol
 404-657-2126 • 888-ASK-GCDD
www.gcdd.org

February 22-25
7th National Rehabilitation
Educators Conference
 San Diego, CA • 618-549-3267
www.rehabeducators.org

MARCH

March 4-6
New Congress, New
Opportunities Disability
Seminar
 Washington, DC • www.nacdd.org

March 8-10
23rd International
Seating Symposium
 Orlando, FL • 412-383-6602
www.iss.pitt.edu

March 12-14
The 23rd Annual
Pacific Rim Conference
on Disabilities
 Honolulu, HI • 808-956-7539
www.pacrim.hawaii.edu

March 19-24
22nd Annual International
Technology and Persons
with Disabilities Conference
(CSUN)
 Los Angeles, CA
 818-677-2578
www.csun.edu/cod/conf

March 23-25
American Foundation
for the Blind
 2007 Josephine L. Taylor
 Leadership Institute
 Dallas, TX
www.afb.org/jltli.asp

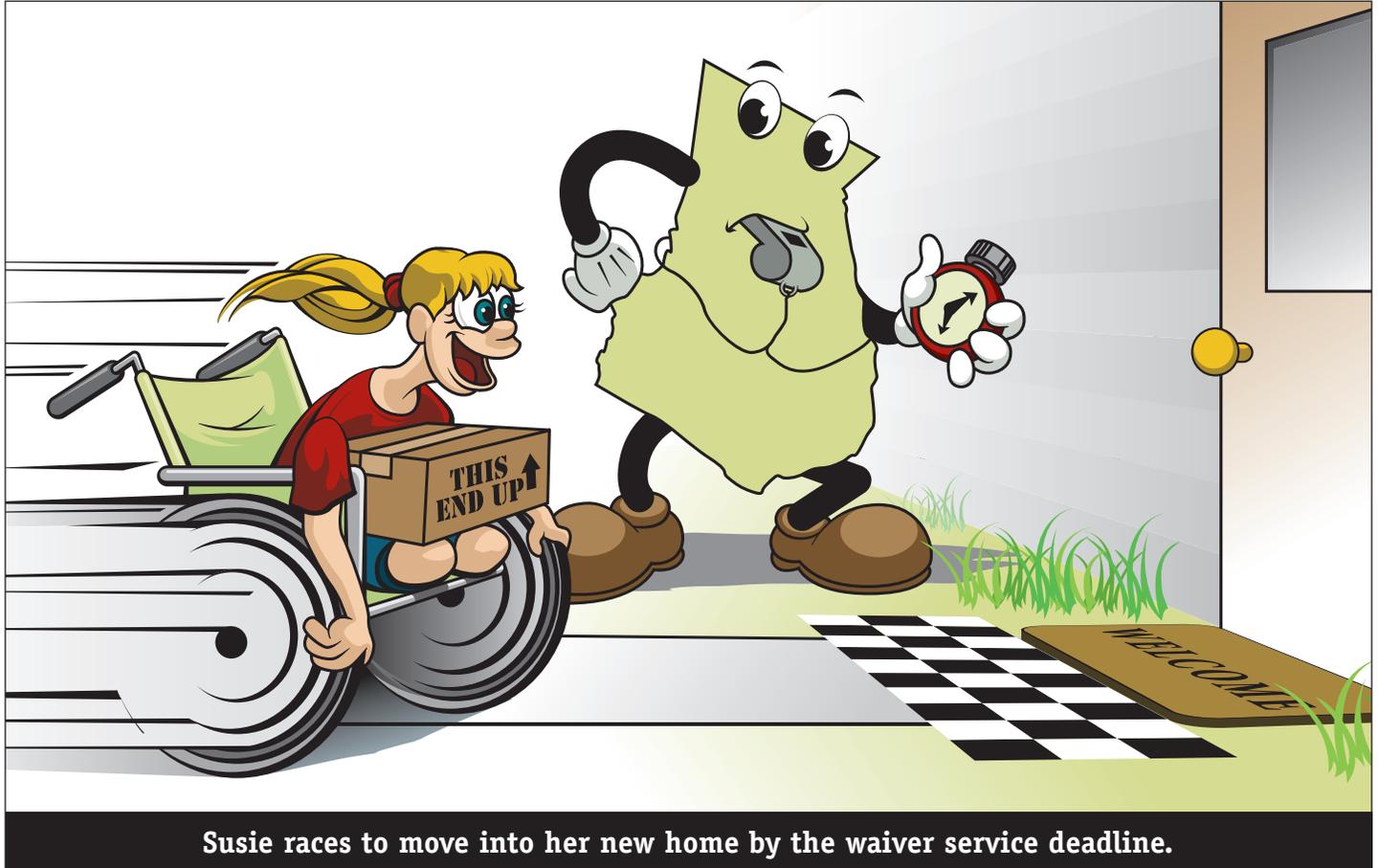
APRIL

April 7
+9 other dates and cities
American Sign Language
Expo 2007
 Indianapolis, IN
www.aslexpo.com

April 13-14
ASA Greater
Georgia Chapter
2007 Annual
Autism Conference
 Duluth, GA
 770-451-0954
www.asaga.com

April 19-20
Governor's Council on
Developmental Disabilities
Quarterly Meeting &
Public Forum
 Waycross, GA
 404-657-2126
 888-ASK-GCDD
www.gcdd.org

April 28 - May 3
ADAPT Spring Action
 Washington, DC
www.adapt.org



Susie races to move into her new home by the waiver service deadline.



Below, please find further resources of information related to the articles in this edition of *Making a Difference* magazine.

Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)

www.gcdd.org
404-657-2126 or
888-275-4233 (ASK-GCDD)

State Government

Department of Community Affairs

Georgia Housing Search
www.georgiahousingsearch.org
877-428-8844

Department of Community Health

www.dch.state.ga.us/
404-656-4507

Department of Human Resources

www.dhr.georgia.gov
404-656-4937

Department of Labor

www.dol.state.ga.us

General Information

www.georgia.gov

Georgia General Assembly

www.legis.state.ga.us/

Georgia House of Representatives

www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/house/index.htm

Georgia Senate

www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/senate/index.htm

Georgia Governor's Office

www.gov.state.ga.us/
404-656-1776

Georgia Lieutenant Governor's Office

www.ltgov.georgia.gov/02/ltgov/home/0,2214,2199618,00.html
404-656-5030

Organizing Institute

Project South

www.projectsouth.org
404-622-0602

Lookout Mountain Community Services

www.lmcs.org
706-638-5580

Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund

<http://www.ciclt.net/bsitf/>
888-233-5760
404-651-5112

disABILITY LINK

www.disabilitylink.org
404-687-8890
404-687-9175 (TTY)
800-239-2507 (Voice/TTY)

Disability Connections

www.disabilityconnections.com
478-741-1425 (Voice / TTY)
800-743-2117 (Voice / TTY)

Advocacy Training

Georgia Advocacy Office

www.thegao.org
404-885-1234

People First of Georgia

www.disabilitylink.org/docs/people.html
404 687-8890

Disability Rights History Tour

ADA

www.adawatch.org/roadtofreedom.htm

Atlanta Public Library

www.af.public.lib.ga.us
404-730-1700

Shepherd Center

www.shepherd.org
404-352-2020

Georgia Voices that Count

Linda Pogue

"Georgia Voices that Count"
GreenPogue@aol.com
404-687-8890 x114

Accessible Money

American Council of the Blind

www.acb.org
202-467-5081

Housing

Consumer Credit Counseling Services

www.cccsatlanta.org
1-800-251-CCCS (2227)

Credit Able

www.credit-able.org
(800) 239-2507

Georgia Department of Community Affairs Georgia Dream Homeownership/CHOICE

www.dcaloans.com
800-359-4663

Georgia Department of Community Affairs Georgia Housing Search

www.georgiahousingsearch.org
1-877-428-8844

Rental Access Network

www.rentalaccessnetwork.org

Georgia Options

georgiaoptions.org
706-546-0009

Habitat for Humanity

www.habitat.org

Macon Housing Authority

www.cityofmacon.net

Disability Day at the Capitol 2007

Mark Your Calendar...Thursday, February 22, 2007

Visit www.gcdd.org or call (888) ASK-GCDD this fall for event details...

RSVP required to attend breakfast or lunch.

- Rally on the Capitol steps to celebrate community, advocacy and friendship.
- Enjoy breakfast or lunch with advocates from across Georgia.
- Show legislators WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



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(770) 676-2000 or 1-888-UCP-WILL
www.ucpga.org

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Make an appointment with your legislators to educate them about disability issues.

Share breakfast or lunch with other advocates and legislators.

For more information, look inside this issue, visit www.gcdd.org or call 888-ASK-GCDD.

FEBRUARY 22, 2007

RALLY BEGINS AT 11 AM ON THE CAPITOL STEPS



Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

2 Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 26-246

Atlanta, GA 30303-3142

404-657-2126, www.gcdd.org

Address Service Requested